

A RAMBLE ROUND ROTHESAY.

LORD BUTE'S BEAVERS.

ROTHESAY, the capital of the island of Bute, was anciently a Royal Residence, and still gives the heir to the throne one of his titles, H.R.H. the Prince of Wales being Duke of Rothesay, or Rosa, as some of the old natives like to pronounce it. It is, owing to the mildness of the climate, generally designated the Montpellier of Scotland—some would go so far, indeed, in their comparisons as to style Montpellier the Rothesay of France—and has a mixed population of hotel-keepers, fishermen, boatmen, lodging-house keepers, and the like, the income of the inhabitants, as a rule, being derived from visitors, more especially those migratory individuals collectively known as “salt-water folk.” Unlike Campbeltown, it has no “staple industry,” and the people, having now less of their old Celtic instincts, do not seem to care to go in for the “barley bree” any further than imbibing it, their Highland extraction so far asserting itself, though the Rosa people are no more marked in regard to the length and strength of their potatoes than the natives of the mainland, or possibly, as they will say themselves, the people of the adjacent islands of Great Britain and Ireland.

It was not, however, to describe the place, the people, and its peculiarities that I “rambled” by the Kintyre boat—which “rambled” so much on the voyage that there was a marked loss of appetite at meal times, which many thought should have been marked in the steward’s bill as jettison—over to Greenock, and from Greenock down round Toward Point into Rothesay Bay. It was rather, indeed, with a view to running down to the foot of the island to see Lord Bute’s beavers, which makes me remark, by-the-by, that between his lordship’s beavers and Lord Lorne’s buffaloes and bisons up at Inverary, Scotland is likely enough after all to become what the crofters’ friends have predicted, “a land of wild beasts and mighty hunters.”

Letting out a solitary passenger at Toward Point, and breathing a prayer inwardly that we might never be left in such a lone bleak spot in such wild weather, we—that is, my solitary self and a small Scotch terrier named Sprig, which I had picked up in Kintyre—sought the shelter of the funnel while the south-western showers came tearing up the Sound from Arran. Not since the day that I had seen the three famous 40-tonners, Britannia Norman, and Bloodhound, bound across the water with short-reefed mainsails to the Bute mark-boat, had I recollected experiencing such wild weather in the place, the sea being a mass of green and white foam flaked over by spindrift. Under the shoulder of the land we soon, however, made fair weather of it, and steamed slowly in up the Ascog side of the shore to the main pier, which, instead of being crammed by eager and excited tourists, as in July and August, when the Columba and other noted vessels are running, was haunted with the figure of some poor fellow, who seemed to flit about from shed to shed as if he did not mind at all about rushing out into the rain and spray in order to seize the ropes which were thrown to him from the bow, with a very indignantly uttered request from the captain on the bridge to “look smart.” Bow and stern having been made fast, we—that is “Sprig” and myself—got ashore and found our way to the Victoria Hotel, which is close to the pier and overlooks the esplanade, and soon were made very comfortable, while the landlord went out and struck a bargain with a local Jehu, who was not, however, the one we wanted, the latter being a poet of a more than local reputation, who has, indeed, published a volume which has been most favourably commented upon by the leading Scotch papers. That the muses should take to cab-driving after following the plough is nothing to be wondered at in—

Caledonia stern and wild,

Meet nurse for a poetic child.

The weather having moderated so far as the taking off of the rain, we were soon whirling down the south side of the shore for Kingarth, the driver, like all Scotch drivers, being exceedingly fond of pointing out the places of interest on the way-side, and communicating such information as he could pick up.

“Ye see *that* stane there,” he said, pulling up opposite the picturesquely situated church of Ascog, which stands on a little

rocky promontory in the bay ; “ that’s the grave of an actor—a play actor, one they called Stanley. He repented before he died, and gave up acting, and went about penting pictures, and they burried him there at his ain wish.” Laughing heartily at the idea of an actor “repenting” and leading a reformed life as an artist, I jumped out, and, with the terrier, cleared the wall in order to have a look at the last residence of Montagu Stanley, as great-souled an actor as ever trod the boards. Dramatic to the last, he chose a spot where he might rest peacefully away from all mankind, where the thrash of the sea was continually heard, and there was nought else to break the stillness but the screams of the gull. As I stood, the waves were dashing so furiously on the rocks below that the foam rose and lashed in columns of spray across the little railed-in grave, and on to the plain stone slab which bears his name. His is the only grave in the enclosure. How many scores of old tunes that simple name recalled ! Once it was read familiarly by many in the bills of the play, and whispered low as his voice was heard when he came on at the wings. Now all around—not a sea of eager faces, but of angry waves. It was, in the opinion of my driver and the natives generally, merely

THE ACTOR’S GRAVE.

Half on the land, and half on the sea,
 Its white walls washed by the salt sea spray,
 Without one yew or one cypress tree,
 The little churchyard looks over the bay.
 Where over the rocks so ragged and bare,
 Stream the yellow locks of the mermaid’s hair ;
 Where through the gloom the gull’s wings gleam,
 And the kittiwakes call and the solans scream,—
There, where the foam line marks the shore,
 And the spindrift flies from the wind-topped wave,
 Life’s curtain down, and life’s drama o’er,
 There has the actor found a grave.

There, where the tide doth ebb and flow,
 The sea-mew whispers her soft aside ;
 There, when the wavelets ripple slow,
 The murmuring shells their cues confide,
 And the soft winds sigh and the salt seas sob,
 And the billows break and the sea caves throb,

And the sky doth smile and the waves do laugh,
As they read the unwritten epitaph—
 “Think not, reader, he lies alone,
 King, and clown, and fool, and knave ;
Here many tombs are, if but one stone,
For, reader, it is an Actor's Grave.”

Driving smartly down the Kerrycroy-road, alongside which many yacht-racing men must have sailed, we turn upwards at the little fishing-village mentioned, and pass through the lovely woods of Mount Stewart, noticing the new mansion at present in an advanced state of construction or re-construction, for it will be remembered it was burnt down a few years ago. When completed it will be one of the finest private mansions in Scotland, as it certainly is one of the most picturesquely situated. A drive of three or four miles brings us to the quaint little country inn at Kingarth, where the hostess provides capital and ample refreshment for man and beast, and, guided by the driver, I make my way over to the spot, leaving the dog confined in the stable, for there was no knowing what mischief he would do, whether as regards rabbit, beaver, or anything else. As to the matter of courage, he would face a lion as readily as a rabbit, being bred off an old Argyllshire strain used for hunting mountain foxes. “I'm afraid you'll only see the places where they work, as they only come out in the night time,” kindly informs my Jehu, who could have told me *that*, no doubt, before we had set out, but did not want to ruin the chance of losing a fare in the dull season. I found he was quite correct, and that if I did wish to really see them I should have to postpone my visit, probably to the first favourable moonlight night, which was impossible.

Getting up into the wood of Scotch pine and larch, traversed by a small stream, I soon saw plenty of evidences of their industry. Some trees were down, with their heads all in the direction of or across the water. Many were half gnawed through, and no doubt would have to come down soon, while some had just been toppled by the gale which was blowing. The various dams have been constructed with great care and substantiality ; indeed, when one sees how they are arranged, so that the ever-flowing water passes over the top at an even rate or quantity per minute, he is astonished.

“They are hard workers,” says the man in charge; “indeed they’ll not stand a lazy one amongst them, and, as you can see yourself, Bute’s no a place they could go on tramp. I’ve often seen them at work in the summer mornings at sunrise, felling timber and carrying mud up and down the streams on their tails; quite different from us, you ken, for we carry our mortar on our heads.”

Altogether the “heads-I-win-tails-you-lose” style of work of the beavers in Lord Bute’s colony interested me very much, and although I had not seen them on duty, I was quite well content with seeing the effects of their operations. That they would prove exceedingly objectionable on a well-wooded estate was, however, quite evident, and the lovers of forestry are never likely to make pets of them.

Getting back to the inn, I sampled the sap of the soil and some oatcakes and cheese, and an hour afterwards found myself back at my hotel. A hasty trip to Kean’s cottage on Loch Fad, where the great King Edmund lived in the delightful company of the grouse and the black-cock for a full season, ’midst the beautiful birch trees, and I was off again to the adjacent island of Great Britain.

